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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



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Spring 1991

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE...GRASS

For small farmers to be successful at producing high levels of grass is not the answer. What is important is net profit from selling a quality product. One of the most innovative ways to maximize net profit for a small operation is the system of rotational grazing of various types of animals. Very small acreages will suffice to establish such a system. Even more importantly, large inputs of capital are not required to be successful. High-quality grass is the key!

For years many agriculture experts considered pasture of very little benefit to feed value. The main benefit of pasture was for exercising the animals outside the confinement of the barn. That would be accomplished if you put three or four cows, sheep, goats, or hogs in even 1 acre of pasture with only a perimeter fence and no interior subdivisions of fencing to form paddocks.

Animals in conventional systems -- free-pasture grazing -- will eat only the grasses and legumes that they prefer. Animals allowed to graze randomly tend to eat some plants and ignore others completely. The vegetation that they do not quickly eat will become more unpalatable and ultimately set seed. The vegetation providing the optimum nutritional value that the animals prefer will be constantly overgrazed and will die out. The condition of the pasture deteriorates and so does the quality/value of livestock. In essence, the unpalatable plants have total rest from grazing, and the palatable plants have no rest, which leads to their death.

Scientists throughout the country are conducting research studies on grazing techniques. These studies show that grazing management is an important component in the success of any animal agriculture operation. Rotational grazing is an approach too long overlooked that can not only improve the health of livestock, but also can increase profits and improve the environment.

Understanding the period of proper rest through grazing techniques was scientifically documented in the 1950's by Andre Viosin. He wrote the book "Grass Productivity" which remains the bellwether when it comes to understanding grazing management. These grazing principles are the same whether you are grazing chickens, ducks, pigs, goats, sheep, or cows.

If you want to browse through this excellent book, contact your local library and request to borrow the book through the intercounty loan system.

How you manage the farm is your decision. However, be aware that benefits are obtained from the excellent grass achieved from good management practices and rotational grazing. Some advantages are:

- Increased profits.
- Increased conservation by reducing pasture erosion.
- Increased pasture stocking rate.
- The need for herbicides to control weeds is reduced.
- The need to clip pastures is reduced.
- Water requirements of the pasture are reduced.
- Grass and money are both green, but rotational grazing is the key management practice to having both!

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Gardening - There are two basic kinds of gardening books: those you consult for information, and the ones you read for pleasure. Write for a copy of AGRI-TOPICS "Great American Gardening Books." Contact: Jayne T. MacLean, Horticulture Information Center, National Agricultural Library, USDA, Beltsville, MD 20705; telephone 301-344-3704.

Prevention - Plant vegetable cultivars that are resistant to insects and diseases. Most tomatoes are not resistant to Fusarium and Verticillium wilt as well as nematodes.

Factsheets - Strawberries, Aquaculture, and Specialty Flowers are the latest in the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" from the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. Contact: Bud Kerr, USDA-CSRS, OSSA, Suite 342, Washington, DC 20250-2200; telephone 202-401-4640, Fax 202-401-5179.

Integrity - "A profitable small farm is not a big farm system with half the acres. Remember, a big elephant chopped in half is not two small elephants but a bloody mess --- H. Allan Nation." (The Stockman Grass Farmer, January 1991, p. 18)

Nontoxic - A pest spray that is environmentally "clean". The formula: 1 tablespoon of dishwashing detergent and 1 cup of oil -- peanut, safflower, corn, soybean or sunflower. Mix 1 to 2 1/2 teaspoons of the prepared solution to 1 cup of water. Then spray on infested plants, using a pump sprayer like the one on a bottle of window cleaner. Contact: George D. Butler, USDA-ARS, Western Cotton Research Laboratory, 4135 East Broadway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85040; telephone 602-379-3524.

Together - "Bottom-Up, A Local Approach to Rural Development" is a free publication. Contact: Cathy Toussaint, Rural Development Center, Kirkwood Community College, P.O. Box 2068, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406; telephone 319-398-5699.

Book - "Advances in New Crops," a new book, contains 560 pages and costs \$68 postpaid. Contact: Tanya Zavestoski, Timber Press, 9999 SW Wilshire, Portland, OR 97225; telephone 800-327-5680.

Costs \$7.50 - Proceedings of the 1991 New York State Vegetable Conference is available. Make your check payable to New York State Vegetable Growers Association. Contact: Jean Warholc, NYSVGA, P.O. Box 356, Ithaca, NY 14851-0356; telephone 607-539-7648.

Scare Birds - Brilliantly colored mylar tape developed in Japan and tested by Washington State University is finding its way into U.S. orchards as a highly successful bird-scaring device. The flashing effect represents fire to a bird. Contact: John Kaye, Modern Agriculture Products, 2770 Aldergrove Road, Ferndale, WA 98248; telephone 206-366-4343.

Mobile Irrigation - A 1,000-gallon tank with a 3-hp pump to fill and drip irrigate about a 1/2-acre plot has been developed. Two filters are used to clean the water. Contact: Kendall C. Elliott, Room 124, Agricultural Science Annex, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26050-6108; telephone 304-293-5031.

Planting Mixes - For a homemade blend, combine equal parts by volume damp peat, perlite, and purchased, sterilized potting soil. To each 2-gallon pail of mix add 2 tablespoons each bone meal and dolomite lime.

Beetle Control - "Early in the morning, dust dry wheat bran on eggplants, potatoes, and other favorite crops of the Colorado potato beetle. The beetles will eat the bran, drink dew to quench their thirst, and burst as the bran expands from the water, extension specialists claim." (Agway Cooperative, July/August, 1990 p. 27)

Early - Iris bulbs reveal their showy blooms 1 to 2 weeks earlier when treated with ethylene, a gas that fruits and vegetables produce during ripening. Contact: Robert P. Doss, USDA-ARS, Horticultural Crops Research, Corvallis, OR 97330; telephone 503-757-4544.

Peach Trees - By first establishing and then killing a stand of Kentucky 31 tall fescue sod underneath peach trees, scientists have found they can increase productivity and also reduce water runoff. Contact: William V. Welker, USDA-ARS, Appalachian Fruit Research Station, Kearneysville, WV 25414; telephone 304-725-3451.

White-Fleshed Peach - A new peach release, scarletpear, ripens in early June in central Georgia and is recommended for peach growers from Texas to North Carolina. Contact: William R. Okie, USDA-ARS, Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Laboratory, Byron, GA 31008; telephone 912-956-5656.

Save Water - Simple, cheap, easy-to-make-at-home covers for livestock water supplies are possible. For instructions on how to build the covers, contact: Allen Dedrick, USDA-ARS, Irrigation and Hydraulics Research, U.S. Water Conservation Laboratory, 4331 E. Broadway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85040; telephone 602-379-4356.

Wings and Hooves - This magazine covers new trends in the small-scale farming of exotic animals and other genetic livestock -- trends that have generally been ignored. Cost: \$16 to U.S. addresses, \$22 Canada and Mexico, and \$30 a year all other. Contact: Ronald McGuffee, Route 3, Box 65, Chandler, OK 74834; telephone 405-258-1173.

Alternative Crops - Changes in society and changes in the economy have made alternative crops more important than ever. Tomatoes, hot peppers, and potatoes originated as wild plants in Latin America, and there are still wild relatives of these crops that haven't been cultivated.

Think Ahead - Now is the time to order the Complete Guide to Home Canning (Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539). Copies (stock No. 001-000-04521-1) are available at \$11 from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20402; telephone the Order Desk, 202-783-3238.

Agricultural Incubator - A new production, marketing, and skills development demonstration is making progress in two counties in Mississippi thanks to TVA's Valley Resource Center. For more information, contact: Porter L. Russ, Agricultural Institute, Tennessee Valley Authority, Muscle Shoals, AL 35660; telephone 205-386-2624.

Consider Leasing - "Treating the cost of newly acquired equipment as an operating expense rather than a capital purchase, is a widely accepted method to conserve tax dollars, and one of the most recognized advantages of leasing---George Lott." (Agway Cooperator, October 1990, p. 24).

All-American - Since 1933, a limited number of vegetable and flower cultivars have had the honor of being designated as All-American Selections (AAS). Each new cultivar submitted for AAS consideration is grown in side-by-side trials next to the closest cultivar on the market. Vegetables are evaluated for flavor, texture, disease resistance, production and space efficiency, nutrition, and novelty value. For more information

about recent winners and the locations of test sites contact: Nona Wolfram - Koivula, AAS, Suite 310, 1311 Butterfield Road, Downers Grove, IL 60515; telephone 708-963-0770.

Cucumber - A 46-minute videotape for training farm workers in cucumber production is available. The tape contains Spanish and English versions and costs \$17; make check payable to Sandusky County Extension Service. Contact: Ron Overmyer, 2000 Countryside Drive, Fremont, OH 43420; telephone 419-334-6340.

Plants - "The current belief that all medicines are made from synthetic compounds is incorrect. Although only a small proportion of plants have been exploited by modern medicine, nearly half of all prescriptions dispensed in the United States contain substances of natural origins; and over half of these contain a plant derived compound---Plants that Give Life." Contact: Daniel Katz, Rainforest Alliance, 270 Lafayette Street, Suite 512, New York, NY 10012; telephone 212-941-1900, Fax 212-941-4986.

Red Alert - "It makes him nervous that the industry is again, as with Red Delicious, getting preoccupied with the redness of varieties like Fugi, Gala and Braburn, trying to develop redder strains. Like Royal Gala. It has a distinct salmon pink color. We start messing around with that and we're going to shoot ourselves in the foot...Gary Ballard." (Good Fruit Grower, October 15, 1990, p. 5)

Bee Alert - The first known swarm of Africanized honey bees to enter the United States from Mexico were trapped and destroyed east of the border city of Hidalgo in the Lower Rio Grande Valley on October 15. Contact: Elba Quintero, USDA-APHIS, Africanized Honey Bee Program Manager, 213 South H Street, Harlingen, TX 78550; telephone 512-421-4041.

Chives - In your home garden, the leaves of this hardy perennial should be cut regularly; however, never remove all the leaves. This allows the plant to be cut over and over throughout the growing season.

Cut The Grass - Experts suggest that frequent clippings favor grass plants. A good procedure is letting the grass grow to 3 inches height, cutting it back to 2 inches, and letting the clippings filter down into the sod to add nutrients to the soil.

TIP - Inquire about and record previous cropping and herbicide use history when negotiating for rental fields. Note any rotation restrictions that will impact future crops.

Information Please - For a complete Census Bureau telephone contacts list, telephone 301-763-4100.

Hot Peppers - "The external question seems to be "how do you put the fire out? Answer: Eat banana, avocado, or bread, and pasta or potato can also help; but never water! Since capsaicins (the hot stuff in peppers) are oils they don't mix with water, but oil absorbers or dissolves help to take the fire out...Doug Sanders." (VEG-I-NEWS, June 1990, p. 12)

SPRING -- OBSESSION -- SOIL

"So while the farmer often feels inferior for his lack of formal knowledge and for his inability to talk the language of the experts, he gets a certain quiet comfort from the teaching of the soil through his hands and his nose.

"There are friends and neighbors who make some small light of the farmer's obsession with being out there on his tractor. That is all right. Each trip to the field, the farmer reasons, is akin to boarding a school bus that will take him to a temple of learning.

"This soil, after all, is a temple of sorts. The learning is constant, the feeling is comforting and the smell...the smell imparts a rare and mystical incense." (Ward Sinclair is a former Washington Post agriculture reporter who now farms a Pennsylvania truckpatch, The Washington Post, February 20, 1991, p. E1)

AUDIO AIDS

Audiotapes are an excellent means to convey information. Factors such as time and high costs sometimes limit or curtail participation or attendance at group meetings at any level, i.e., local, national, or international. Therefore, the best way to obtain information presented at these meetings is by an audiotape. It can be retained for future reference, is inexpensive, and is an accurate account of material presented. The following are good examples.

North Dakota's "Market Place 91" in January 1991 was a gathering of several hundred people, and everyone involved was delighted with the positive atmosphere generated from the seminars.

A list of tapes available may be obtained by contacting Larry Weller, Studio A, 105 East Broadway, Bismarck, ND 58501; telephone 701-223-8980.

Audiotapes made at the 1990 Intensive Grazing Conference, November 1990, cost \$9.95 each. Some titles offered:

- Pasture Poultry (60 minutes), Joel Salatin
- Alternative Marketing (120 minutes), Laura Freeman/Joel Salatin
- Creating Quality Pasture (120 minutes), Alan Henning
- Pasture Water and Grass Systems (120 minutes), Lil Bransby
- A Technosystem Approach/Grass and Genetics (60 minutes), Becky Hicks, John Wall, Luane Schroeder

Contact: Louis Shivers, The Stockman Grass Farmer, P.O. Box 9607, Jackson, MS 39286; telephone 601-981-4805, Fax 601-981-8558.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 18, 1991 - Pest Control Workshops, Agriculture Center Auditorium, Sanford, FL. Contact: Uday K. Yadav, University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service, 250 West County Home Rd., Sanford, FL 32773; telephone 407-323-2500, Ext. 5559.

April 23-25, 1991 - Leadership Conference, Human Resources/Natural Resources: Diversity for Success, Holiday Inn, Stevens Point, WI. Contact: Dana Nelson, University of Wisconsin, 2100 Main Street, Room 103, Stevens Point, WI 54481-3897; telephone 715-346-3717.

May 4-5, 1991 - The 18th Annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD. Contact: Mary Streaker, 1739 Circle Rd., Towson, MD 21204; telephone 301-823-4037.

May 10-12, 1991 - Varieties of Sustainability, Reflecting in Ethics, Environment, and Economic Equity, Asilomar Conference Center, Pacific Grove, CA. Contact: Cindy Van Tassel, Agroecology Program, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064; telephone 408-459-3240.

May 16, 1991 - Nursery Tour and Research Update, Skinner's Tree Farm and Wholesale Nursery, Crescent City, FL. Contact: Uday K. Yadav, University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service, 250 West County Home Rd., Sanford, FL 32773; telephone 407-323-2500, Ext. 5559.

May 25, 1991 - Fifth Annual Baltimore Herb Festival, 10 am to 6 pm, Leakin Park (just off the Baltimore Beltway). Contact: Mary Louise Wolf, 2301 Pickwick Rd., Baltimore, MD 21207; telephone 301-448-0406.

June 20-21, 1991 - The 21st Annual Conference and Trade Show of the Louisiana Greenhouse Grower's Association, Holiday Inn (Holidome), Baton Rouge, LA. Contact: Dennis Wollard, LGGA Sec-Tres., USL Box 4433, Lafayette, LA 70504; telephone 318-231-5348.

July 13-17, 1991 - International Floriculture Industry Short Course, Cincinnati Convention Center, Cincinnati, OH. Contact: Teresa Roll, Ohio Florists' Association, 7500 Ackerman Road, Suite 230, Columbus, OH 43202-1584; telephone 614-267-1117, Fax 614-267-6259.

July 19-22, 1991 - HERBS 91. International Herb Growers and Marketers Association Sixth Annual Conference, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Minneapolis, MN. Contact: Ed Stygar, 1202 Allanson Rd., Mundelein, IL 60060; telephone 708-566-4566.

Send - Topics, technologies, and calendar of events (yours) to the Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA); telephone 202-401-4640. Dialcom-AGS3037 H. Kerr or Fax 202-401-5179.

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